Action Research in the Library: Method, Experiences, and a Significant Case

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This project resembles "a mirror reflecting our work", or "a cake that is made up by many ingredients, and raises them"; this working group resembles "a ring-a-ring-a-roses of people stepping synchronously to the center", or "an orchestra in which each instrument has to tune up with the others, producing something harmonious, led by the director". These are some of the metaphors used by some librarians who have agreed in participating an action research project that was aimed to improve the perception of public services in a university library. The project turned out to be an important occasion for professional growth, both for individual participants and for the organization.
To understand what kind of work was carried out, we shall overview the theoretical principles of the action research method; we will then analyze the domains of its application in a library; and we finally shall expose an experience from which some "good practices" can be drawn and applied to other organizational contexts.

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The Action Research Method

What is action research? The answer is not easy, because different meanings – both practical and theoretical – have been developed in the 65 years since the term appeared in the scientific literature. Yet, we will try to offer the essential coordinates to answer the question. "Intervention research", which according to some scholars is a broader concept, has been sometimes defined "participation research" or "collaborative inquiry", stressing the importance of sharing the process of exploration aimed to introduce novelties and changes into the examined context. It is evident that such mode of research can raise interest in libraries that are most sensitive to total quality management. If continuous improvement is the goal, research activities and constant monitoring are means.
How was the research method created?
Caring for minorities' problems, Kurt Lewin used the term "action research" for the first time in 1946, with the goal of promoting social action together with research in social psychology. Ideas of carrying out a "field research" with mainly qualitative techniques (such as observation, interviews, focus groups, diaries), of involving the subjects directly on the studied topic, and of identifying collegially what changes should be made, has been developed not only by psychologists, but also by educationalists, since 1970s-80s.
Since 1990s literature on the topic proliferated and differentiated on a geographical basis: whereas Europe deepened the psychoanalitic stream applied to public and private organizations, in North America the partecipative and empowerment approach found ground in the study of communities. Moreover, as the employment of action research spreaded worldwide, it assumed peculiar forms in educational, training, and school contexts. However, such peculiarities are not the focus here.
Rather, it is appropriate here to specify the phases of the action

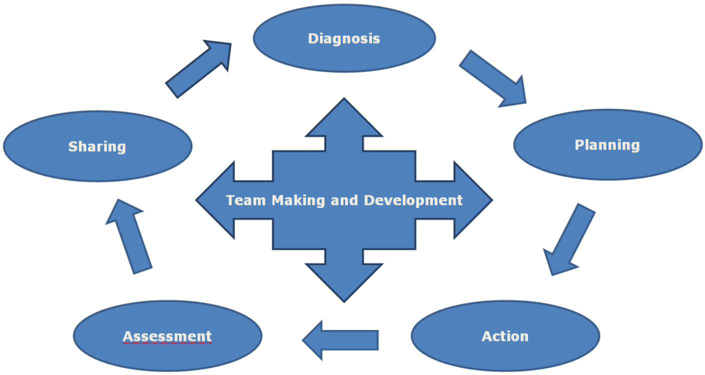


Figure 1: The five phases of the action research process

research process. The three identified by Kurt Lewin (planning, execution, evaluation), have become four or five; five phases are the most credited in recent literature, and they are (figure 1):

1) *diagnosis*: identification or definition of a problem, by means of documentation, comparative analyses, and survey with different techniques (interviews, focus groups, observations, questionnaries etc.);

2) *planning*: elaboration of an action plan for one or more interventions in accordance with the research done;

3) *action*: realization of the interventions;

4) *assessment*: gathering of feedback about the realized interventions by means of qualitative and/or quantitative techniques;

5) *critical reflection and communication of learning*: reflection upon the experience, which may bring to the realization of further

actions; identification of results reached, and sharing of the experience both within the context and outside, towards the relevant scientific community.

Research techniques must be chosen as a function of the goal and of the examined context, but qualitative ones are usually more suited to analyze the problems in deep, and to stimulate reflections that are useful for promoting changes.
From the operational point of view, it is fundamental that a small work group (maximum ten people) be created, coordinated by an expert in the research techniques with good relational skills and an educational attitude. Indeed, task of the researcher is to accompany the group's evolution, fostering the acquisition of awareness which is the first requirement for self-education and further developments.
In accordance with the complexity of the project, an action research can last months or years, during which the group meets once a month or every fifteen days, and is supposed to do some work between one meeting and the following. It is easy, then, to guess that the coordinator needs to not only be prepared methodologically, but also be able to manage group dynamics, including conflict, and to negotiate and communicate effectively; above all, she must be able to listen and foster the inner growth of every group member.
Changes that are expected in action research, indeed, are both individual and collective and are established by the involved subjects themselves. Within an organizational context, aims of the action-research might be the resolution of problems, the improvement of work processes and users' perception, but also the increase of awareness in people who are involved, their understanding of an examined topic, and their training.
Reflection precedes and follows action, generates learning-by-doing, and produces knowledge which is agent of change. So there is a tight interconnection between theory and practice, analysis and

action, knowledge and change. The process is defined "cyclic" or "spiral" because, indeed, results of a phase feed the subsequent one, and assessment of intervention can translate into novel learning or activities.
Writing is an excellent tool for expliciting reflections and perceptions, for fixating acquired knowledge, and for keeping track of it for a re-reading after a while, in the perspective of continued monitoring. Moreover, some training techniques belonging to the narrative and autobiographic approach can favor self-reflection, confrontation among points of view, and exchange of experiences within the group and with different stakeholders who are in contact.[1] The construction of knowledge is thus participated, as emphasized by the constructivist approach in social sciences.
The resulting knowledge is relative to a specific context, and is valid insofar as it is useful, appropriate, and shared in there. Results of an action research are not generalizable, as positivism would require, but a detailed description of the work done can allow the identification of "good practices" which are transferable in analogous situations.[2]

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[1] Autobiographical educational techniques aim to improving self-awareness by proposing stimuli to narrating cognitive and emotional personal experiences, orally or by writing, possibly with the help of drawing, photographs, objects, etc.; subjects are involved both individually (writing, biographical interview) and collectively (small group activities and group sharing). The autobiographical and the narrative approach develop in educational sciences most of all since 1990s, referred in particular to education in adulthood. There is a wide reference literature (Atkinson; Demetrio; Formenti; Moroni, *Bambini e adulti si raccontano*; Smorti).

[2] Scentific criteria recently proposed for action research are the following: *explicit statement* of goals and modes of research, including the kind of collaboration between researchers and operators, techniques for data gathering and analysis etc.; *transferability*, coming from a detailed description of the situation so that one can see himself in the reported case studies and transpose some methodological elements; *adequacy* of the research from the stakeholders' point of view. Other authors propose the following reliability criteria for action research: *democratic validity*: degree of

Actors who are involved in the process are thus supposed to account for the experience and to communicate it outside, so expressing the dynamic and social development potential wished by Kurt Lewin. Indeed, the exercise of democracy which is necessary in the action research group, the assumption of responsibilities in the planning and realization of interventions, and the commitment to sharing and diffusing contents and processes, represent attitudes which are expendable in many organizational and social contexts. In other words, if a small group worked well serving many, why not taking cue from such experience to realize similar activities in a larger group?

Action Research in Libraries

A question should follow: what action research experiences have been realized in libraries? Which topics have been explored, and with which results? To answer such questions, a bibliographic research was carried out using the main sources of information in the field: the database *Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA)* and the open archive *E-prints in Library and Information Science (E-LIS)*.[3]

Such research yielded 260 results consisting in theoretical information science studies or in accounts of experiences in various contexts (companies, public bodies, communities, universities, etc.); the oldest document dates back to 1978, but the great majority (216

participation an collaboration between researchers and operators; *result validity*: effectiveness of the realized interventions in light of the research; *process validity*: relevancy of the methods, techniques, and procedures chosen in relation to a problem; *cathalitic validity*: degree of deepening of the issue and potential for change; *dialogue validity*: degree of peer communication, internal sharing and extenal diffusion (Gilardi and Bruno; Pickard).

[3]The bibliographic research was carried out in July 2011.

publications) start with year 2000.
By focusing the specific context of libraries, 61 documents have been found, 25 of which are relative to university libraries, 19 to school libraries, and 17 to public libraries which should include also libraries in hospitals, prisons, companies etc. The large number of documents concerning educational contexts (school and university) may be due, on the one hand, on the psychopedagogic research field, and, on the other hand, on universities' own vocation for research.
Given that below we shall illustrate the experience realized in a university library, we now deepen the research results concerning academic cases (which are 27, because we included two documents that are cited in an authoritative essay on the topic) (Pickard).
Publications years that are relative to university libraries begin with 1991, and concentrate in 2005-2010 (as much as 17). Places where experiences have been carried out touch on all continents: 14 in Europe (8 just in Great Britain, 3 in Italy, and single cases in France, Holland, and Portugal), 10 in America (6 in USA, and single cases in Argentina, Brasil, Canada, and Colombia), 2 in Oceania (Australia) and one in Asia (India). The prevalence of English and American experiences can be explained by historical-cultural factors: Kurt Lewin, who was hebrew born in Germany, emigrated in the US in 1933, and beginning with 1950s the English psychologists at *Tavistock Institute* carried out various organizational analyses with the Action research method.
As for the subjects involved and the topics considered, many action research projects in academic libraries (13 out of 27) involved the users in the analysis of perception and usage of library services, some projects (9) involved the staff in the diagnosis of working processes and relational dynamics, and other projects (5) involved both staff and users on topics like Information Literacy and digital library.
Information Literacy is the most frequent topic (as many as 9 cases),

this may be attributed to the training dimension of action research we cited above; sometimes, an impact evaluation is done of user-addressed training activities, whether in person or in distance (e-learning platforms, tutorial); sometimes, longitudinal inquiries are done to measure the increase of university students' information skills with reference to specific training programs.
In some cases, the participated inquiry is focused on a particular service, such as reference or document delivery; in others, it is concentrated on electronic resources or open access; in only one case the library services, settings, and technologies are examined.
Researches involving directly the library staff have addressed topics like organizational climate, empowerment, leadership, and internal communication; sometimes, they considered back office or front office working processes, other times they were tied to training or organizational development projects.
The main research techniques adopted have been interview and observation, but questionnaires, focus groups, and diaries too are used for gathering staff's and users' opinions, experiences, and perceptions.[4]
On the one hand, action research activities are reported as useful for the improvement library services, with particular reference to educational service; on the other hand, they stimulate a reflection on working processes and relational dynamics, opening new perspectives or mobilizing novel attitudes.
In some articles, the method's effectiveness is emphasized from different perspectives:

- it develops empathy and ability for listening colleagues and users, thanks to the thick confrontation within the organization, and to the opening to external opinions, suggestions, and

[4]For an overview of qualitative research techniques see Cardano (*La ricerca qualitativa*) and Silverman (*Doing qualitative research : a practical handbook*).

good practices;

- it can extend the increase of involved people's motivation and awareness to the professional community, provided that internal and external communication is taken care of;

- - it improves professional practices or offered services, by following a development plan which derives from deep analysis of reality and shared individuation of solutions.

Moreover, authors of action research theoretical or experiential contributions often wish action research to be spread and used more in library contexts, not only for its validity but also for its timeliness. Indeed, at present, the public sector features an unprecedented tension to continuous improvement, to total quality management and resource saving (economic, temporal, human, etc.), by means 360°. measurement and assessment activities. The action research method tends right to a complete analysis of what is at issue, going through diachronic comparison of organizational data, benchmarking with analogous organizations, and gathering of new information from various stakeholders.
The recent years, following books by Donald Schön, have seen the figure of the "reflective professional" being emphasized in several domains. Action research concretely pushes abilities of learning by reflection on one's own conduct, an attitude to continuing research and development, and field learning both individual and collective. Finally, seeing – like action research does – quantitative and qualitative research methods as complementary (as opposed to antagonistic), and employing qualitative methods for a deeper analysis, are in line with the most recent literature in social sciences.
In light of the survey above, and of the latter considerations, we decided to give attention to this research method, and to present

hereafter a recent experience that has turned out meaningful in several respects.

An Action Research Experience: the Case of Milano-Bicocca

The action research done in the Milano-Bicocca University Library began at the end of 2009, and ended at the beginning of 2011; the activity was carried out in the context of a biennial project whose goal was the improvement of the perceived quality of services.
The project was entrusted to a work group composed by librarians from the three bases of the University Library, and coordinated by the present writer as an expert of qualitative research. In order to analyze the usage and perception of the offered services, and more broadly of the library, many students, teachers, and researches of all the Faculties in the University were contacted. So the experience involved both staff and users, focused the library as a whole, and combined qualitative and quantitative research methods taken as complementary.
In illustrating the job done, we shall follow the five-phases articulation of the action research process. However, we have to point out that the "critical reflection and communication of learning" was not limited to the final part: it was carried on throughout the process. By the way, it is appropriate here to specify some methodological aspects that contributed to the project's success. Six librarians participated voluntarily all the way through, whereas three others only in the initial part. Motivations to participate were made explicit in the first meeting, along with initial expectations, and can be so summarized: the possibility of confronting with colleagues who are different from the ordinary job, the desire of learning something

new most of all about research, and the wish of doing something useful to the library.

The first meeting was also occasion to remind some lessons from Project Management and Membership, such as the importance of timing, monitoring, and sharing activities, as well as of taking care of integration and information exchange among the group components. In the same meeting the project was laid out, first impressions about it were gathered, and the first activities to be performed were defined and assigned to a couple of subgroups just in order to favor confrontation and cooperation. Always varying the composition of micro-groups turned out an effective idea also for the improvement of organizational climate into the group, and for the increase of motivation.

The work group met once a month with a similar agenda: each micro-group explained the work done and communicated about the experience (possibly encountered difficulties, reasons for satisfaction or unsatisfaction, etc.), considerations were shared, and the following tasks were planned. In a couple of meetings the participants were asked to express sensations and thoughts about the project or the work group, also by metaphors, drawings, and brief texts, taking inspiration from the autobiographic approach in education which is aimed to foster individual and group self-awareness.

A further tool for critical reflection that turned out useful for improving the project and group management in progress was an anonymous questionnaire, administered at four times in the course: the group components were asked to assess various aspects of the project manager (managerial, relational, motivational, etc.), to make suggestions for improvement, to communicate perceptions about the project (timing, work load, tasks, etc.) and about the work group (cohesion and integration, organizational climate, internal communication, etc.). Some group components were wavering and skeptical

at the beginning, but, once they saw improvements as answers to their feedback, they got more trustful and all were satisfied by the 360°.[5]

But which activities have been done in relation with the various stakeholders? Let us revisit the work done following the action research phases.

1. *Diagnosis*

   The so-called "identification of the problem" have been divided in two parts:

   I. documentation, self-training and benchmarking on the library services;
   II. double inquiry (quantitative and qualitative) addressed to the users.

   The first part was realized between november 2009 and march 2010 by the following activities:

   - bibliographic research and examination of the literature concerning library services;
   - study of several international surveys about users of university libraries;
   - benchmarking among Italian university libraries in respect to services, with particular attention to book loan;
   - comparison between interlibrary service practices across the three bases of the library;
   - analysis of quick reference requests received most frequently by the institutional email boxes throughout the previous year;

[5] The University Central Administration asks the project manager to assess the group components.

- careful reading of feedback given by aide students in the last periodical surveys (self-interviews at the end of each 150-hours collaboration, comparable to a questionnaire with many open questions).

The second part may be summarized as follows:

- analysis of the results of 776 questionnaires about services, resources, and tools of the library, administered to students and teachers in the Good Practices Project from July to October 2009;[6]
- realization and analysis of 47 interviews to a meaningful sample of students, teachers, and researchers from February to April 2010, aimed to understand in depth the results of the questionnaires, and to make improvement suggestions emerge from users.

The double research yielded some data which are important to better understand the subsequent interventions: the perception of the library is very positive, as testified by scores from medium to high concerning services, resources, and tools, with peaks of satisfaction regarding electronic resources according to teachers, and regarding human resources according to students; more worrying data revealed poor usage of the website, of the digital library, and of some advanced services (reference, interlibrary services), resulting from ignorance of them or from scarce awareness of their potentialities; users

[6]Good Practices is a project managed by Business School del Politecnico di Milano (MIP) realized every two years (since 1999), aimed to compare efficiency and effectiveness performances of supporting services (such as supplies, bookkeeping, personnel management, research and didactic support services) to central administrations of universities. In 2009 experimental Laboratories on Libraries, Building and Governance have been carried out (Catalano).

suggested most of all to increase the promotion of services and the training in bibliohgraphic research.
Results of questionnaires and interviews were shared first with the workgroup, then with the rest of the library staff, and finally with all users and potential stakeholders, since research reports were uploaded on the website (Biblioteca di Ateneo di Milano-Bicocca, *Indagini sui servizi bibliotecari per migliorare*) and pointed out in a newsletter to all institutional users.

2. *Planning*
The work done by micro-groups in the first phase was made to merge into the elaboration of an action plan, which was then submitted to the persons in charge of the library in order to obtain their feedback. Once designed and approved by the library director, the action plan was shared with all the staff (37 units) by email.

3. *Action*
Realization of interventions in light of the diagnosis have embraced the period between May and December 2010. The workgroup implemented some 20 interventions relative to library services and their promotion; moreover, it communicated to other colleagues the wishes for improvements concerning resources (both in paper and electronic) and tools (computers, copiers, etc.).
The realized interventions may be classified in the following areas:

    - *promotion*: elaboration of a monthly newsletter drawing the attention upon a couple of news published on the website, and emphasizing some of the offered services; arrangement of news about library services for the Bicocca University newsletter (BNews); review of all Faculty

and Deparment websites, and consequent request for the insertion of a link to the library where absent; creation of a promotional poster of the digital library, posted up in the most strategic points of university buildings; realization of colored bookmarks with promotional slogans concerning some services (personalized loan functions, loan extension for graduating students, electronic resources, reference, etc.); enhancement of presentations of library services in occasion of first-year students meetings organized by Faculties at the beginning of the academic year;

- *information literacy*: activation of monthly interdisciplinary seminars about books and articles search, and enhancement of Faculty-specific seminars; creation of an *ad hoc* website subsection into the "services" section (page illustrating training activities in person and at distance, guides for general and disciplinary bibliographic searches, calendar of training activities done and coming, programs and didactic materials of the training activities of the current year, online form for seminar enrollment);
- *reference*: creation of specific maps for each of the six Faculties afferent to the Central Library, in order to favoring orientation and fruition of the library collection; elaboration of many standard answers to most frequently asked questions incoming in institutional email boxes, for the optimization of answering times and the form and content standardization;
- *loan*: introduction of double loan renewal for undergraduate, graduating, and graduate students, in light of the results of interviews and benchmarking with other universities with size (by number of enrolled students) com-

parable to Milano-Bicocca;

- *interlibrary services*: predisposition of an automatic answering message to confirm the request and make explicit the clearing times for the Central Library, in order to improve perception of the service; elaboration of standard answers or written communications (email, fax) common to the three bases, following from a careful exam of different case records; creation of four flux diagrams (active and passive Inter Library Loan and Document Delivery) for illustrating the ongoing process, with possible differences across the three branches, as well as for individuating transferable good practices and areas for improvement;
- *reading Rooms*: predisposition and posting of several signs for inviting users to keep silence as a form of respect of people who are studying, most of all in the Central Library and in the Science Library where the main discontent had been noted; movement of books on the most congested shelves, for reducing disorder which had been complained of; constant monitoring of temperature and prompt reports to the technical office to obviate discomfort from cold which had been noticed.

Then, as a function of the contents expressed in the most recent self-interviews filled out by aide students, a midterm meeting was introduced (after about 75 hours out of the 150 of total collaboration), in order to point out some aspects (received training, internal communication, working loads, working practices, etc.) and to gather a first feedback to be used with the same group of students. To improve fellow students' training – and, consequently, the information given by them to users – but also to enhance their motivation in working in the library,

since 2010 a seminar was instituted, where all the functions of the Bicocca-Insubria online catalogue – including Dewey Decimal Classification search – are illustrated, the main Italian catalogues (Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale, MetaOpac Azalai Italiano and Archivio Collettivo Nazionale dei Periodici) are showed along with the possibility of searching by subject, and the functioning of interlibrary services is explained. The same seminar is periodically proposed to users, alternated with the one centered on article search through the digital portal of Milano-Bicocca library.

All the actions realized by the group in collaboration with other colleagues were summarized in a report which was sent around inside and outside the library: all the staff were invited to a meeting to share considerations, and the same report was emphasized with a news on the website (*Ricerca-Azione in biblioteca*) and in a newsletter addressed to all institutional users.

The diagnosis operated within the Front Office Project also had a "long wave" of subsequent actions: indeed, in 2011 the University Library has included among its goals the writing of a new Service Charter, the Front Office riorganization, and the improvement of the Educational Sciences collection – an area where citicalities was pointed out in the interviews.

4. *Assessment*

Since a complete assessment of all the interventions realized was not possible, it was decided, on the one hand, to concentrate on some strategic services such as reference and Information Literacy, and, on the other hand, to monitor the perception "in the round" of the library, by means of different quantitative and qualitative tools.

Concerning reference, a survey work was carried on as an ex-

periment on one disciplinary area in 2008, and then extended to other areas in 2009 and 2010: the email administration of a questionnaire after a lapse of time after the session, allowed a feedback about several aspects (information, training, relation, timing, etc.) and also an assessment of its impact, highlighting the acquired bibliographic research skills. The outcomes of the surveys of the two-year period are very positive, and the reasons given for the grades have allowed the full understanding of the gathered data. Efficiency and effectiveness of the service do not have allowance for improvement; the only element on which more work might be done is promotion, but as long as the amount of human resources dedicated to the service cannot be increased, an excessive visibility would run the risk of just worsening the perception, due to the inability of fulfilling a large number of requests (Moroni, *Valutazione del servizio di reference specialistico: indagini per aree disciplinari*).

As for Information Literacy, a light questionnaire was created for being administered at the end of each seminar (disciplinary or interdisciplinary). It yields a numerical and verbal "on the spot" feedback about liking and learning; the questionnaire also asks an overall evaluation of the library. Again, the assessment of the offered service was rewarding (an average of 8,5/10, and very positive comments on the usefulness of gained information, and on the clarity of exposition); moreover, some users' suggestions were useful for improving the teaching effectiveness of the subsequent seminars. The statistical assessment of the service, compared with the previous years, is surprising: the number of users involved was five times (a hundred compared to about five hundreds units), and this was due both to offers enhancement (seventy hours of training led by a couple of librarians in 2010), and to the care

for *in loco* and online promotion (signs around in the library, announcements on the website, newsletters, etc.) (*Valutazione dei seminari sulla ricerca bibliografica anno 2010*).
The overall perception of the library that resulted from the questionnaires administered at the end of seminars is quite positive, and above the level that was found in the questionnaires and interviews we mentioned in the diagnosis section. An analogous judgement came out from the self-interviews filled out, again, at the end of seminars. These comprised the same questions that were asked *de visu* to students and teachers, in order to get information about satisfaction and use of services, resources, and tools, as well as suggestions to improve the library and its promotion (*Indagine sulla Qualità percepita: la biblioteca vista dagli utenti*). Certainly, the strong appreciation of training activities which were organized by librarians influenced the overall assessment of the library, but it would be hasty to hypothesize that Information Literacy could impact on the perceived quality, since the users that are reachable through such service are but "a drop in the sea" given the large number of institutional users (over thirty-five thousands).
Rather, it will be interesting to get the results of the survey tied to the Good Practices Project 2011, although the posed questions differ from those in 2009 concerning library services. Furthermore, considering that a great part of the most significant interventions of the Front Office Project concerned promotion and education – as a function of what was brought about by the inquiries – a proper impact evaluation would require other criteria for surveying. An increase in the use of library services and resources, for example, might be tied to the promotional operation carried out in 2010; but, in order to

know in depth the efficacy of communication activities and to identify possible areas for improvement, interviews and focus groups would be necessary. Finally, in order to test the training efficacy of seminars after lapses of time, it would be interesting to observe the behavior of users searching for books and articles. However, you can easily guess that the realization of such hypothesized survey projects would require much time and, at the present moment, the few resources that are available are concentrated on other duties.

5. *Critical reflection and communication of learning*.
   After the assessment of interventions tied to the object of action research, let us examine the assessment of the project by the involved subjects, which has been gathered through autobiographical inputs proposed during some meetings, as well as with a periodical feedback questionnaire about the project, the work group, and the project manager. Remember that training and research tools that were used were aimed to favor critical reflection, to elicit improvement areas, and to stimulate self-awareness on the progress done.
   In light of all this, in particular of the last meeting featuring an overall review of the experience, we may say that an emotive and cognitive evolution of the group components took place. The beginning was marked by fear of confrontation with new people, and dismay or anxiety for the unusual tasks or timings; with the passing of time, however, a more peaceful and pleasant climate spread, and eventually resulted in enthusiastic statements about the work accomplished, profitable collaboration with colleagues, and a coordination function that had been always goal-focused but sufficiently flexible and caring for each one's needs. From the cognitive point of view, some have emphasized the necessity of concentrating on the project

and of having a mental strategy, others have appreciated the self-reflective component which exploited their daily activity, and still others declared to have learned much from confrontation, realized activities, and employed methodologies.
Some images and phrases used by the group components during the last meeting speak to emotional intelligence and deliver with immediateness what we have tried to synthesize: "At the first meeting I felt like a child at her first school day, and asked myself: how will my colleagues and leader be?"; "For me this has been similar to climbing a mountain: at the beginning I wasn't able to measure the effort and didn't see the top, then, when we started to make interviews, I saw the landscape in its entirety, the cooperation with colleagues has been like a downhill slope, and the goal became the valley beyond!"; "It's been like a trip by train, in which I saw many landscapes, met different people, and discovered interesting things... now I feel like telling to others!".
The sharing of learning with colleagues, users, and with the librarians community has been in part realized, and is in part in progress. The possibility of treasuring this experience now depends on readers...

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Abstract: This article aims to promoting action research in library contexts by illustrating the method and its applications in library, and by presenting a meaningful case. Action research, devised in 1950s, was spread in information sciences since 1990s, with results that have been interesting in promoting change of involved people and organizations. The method is based on engaging a group coordinated by a researcher. Problem analysis is functional to realizing improvement interventions, in a recursive process of reflection, action, evaluation, and result sharing. The action research case at the University Milano Bicocca Library is meaningful under various aspects: increase of motivation and awareness in the working group that was responsible of improving the perception of library services; complementary use of quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to analyze users' service utilization and satisfaction; realization of many interventions, coherent with research results, aimed to enhance service usage and perceived quality; self-reflection and reflection on the organizational context, benchmarking with other libraries and assessment of the realized activities in the perspective of continuing improvement; internal sharing and external diffusion of the project to the advantage of librarians, users, and researchers.
Keywords: Action Research; Research Methods; Qualitative Research; Continuos Improvement; Users.
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